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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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Well, I'm sitting here having withdrawal pains; I finally ran out of Thanksgiving leftovers fairly quickly this year! I'm not sure whether or not I ate a lot quickly, or I just didn't prepare enough in the first place! I guess it doesn't really matter; it's all gone now!

So, while I bemoan the lack of leftovers, there's plenty of stuff for all of you this week to whet your appetites!

Until next time...

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - PlayStation 4 UK Launch Sales Hit 250k!
""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""""   'Call of Duty' and PS4 Are Gaming's Most Wanted!
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->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!
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PlayStation 4 UK Launch Sales Hit 250k

The numbers are in and Sony has been crowned king of the next-gen launches - PlayStation 4 sold a whopping 250,000 units in the UK over the weekend.

That's around 100,000 more than Xbox One sold over its launch a week ago, MCV reports.

The numbers are even bleaker for Nintendo - its year of Wii U sales have now been trounced in a weekend by both next-gen machines. More people bought a PS4 and a copy of Knack over the weekend than bought a Wii U at any point over the past year and new release Super Mario 3D World.

PlayStation 4 made around £87 million in 48 hours. Earlier this morning it was confirmed to be the UK's fastest-selling console in history.

'Call of Duty' and PlayStation 4 Are Gaming's Most Wanted

If you're wondering which new game console to get, and you like playing online with others, you might be thinking about which console is more popular, since Microsoft's and Sony's networks aren't compatible. If that's the case, a recent report hints that you should get a PlayStation 4, and that you'll likely be playing "Call of Duty: Ghosts" in multiplayer.

A report from Nielsen shows that more gamers want Sony's PlayStation 4 over Microsoft's Xbox One. Nielsen asked 1,200 "active gamers" about their shopping plans via an online survey. Thirty percent answered PS4, 22 percent answered Xbox One and 10 percent answered Wii U.

When Nielsen asked these gamers what titles they wanted for the new consoles, the most requested was "Call of Duty: Ghosts," leading both the Xbox One and the PS4 top 10 lists and ranking No. 7 on the Wii U's list.

Take that news with a grain of salt, though. Black Friday sales data gathered by research firm InfoScout showed the Xbox One outselling the PS4 two-to-one. However, "Call of Duty: Ghosts" also topped the company's results.

Looking at games that were exclusive to their respective platforms, the choices were unsurprising. A new edition of the "Uncharted" series, of which little is known except its existence announced at the PS4 launch event, led for the PS4 games. A new "Halo" game, similarly a mystery (except for a teaser from Microsoft's Xbox One event in June), led for Xbox One games. And Nintendo's latest "Mario" game, "Super Mario 3D World," topped the Wii U list. All three games are part of critically and financially successful series.

How Eye Tracking Could Change Computing

Tobii, a Swedish company that makes eye-tracking technology for computers, announced today (Dec. 3) that it will be releasing the EyeX Engine, a software kit to help developers utilize the company's EyeX eye-tracking tech.

With the Tobii developers' kit, game makers and software designers can add support for eye tracking to their programs.

A concept video for the EyeX tech shows eye tracking being used in a variety of ways. For example, a user's eyes guide a cursor around a Web page to click on things; Windows can also use eye tracking to automatically log in recognized users.

EyeX can also check a user’s head position; Netflix pauses automatically when the computer’s camera detects the user nodding off. In another clever example, a dialogue box popped up EyeX detected the user reading the words, then automatically closed the box when the user finished reading it.

Gaming is often one of the first applications of any new computer technology. The EyeX video showed that while playing a first-person shooter, the player’s sight can control the crosshairs for his machine gun, while character movement is still guided by the mouse and keyboard.

The player can also use EyeX’s head-tracking to tilt his head around a corner in the game to look for enemies without exposing his whole body to the possibility of enemy gunfire. Another example showed a little girl playing "Where’s Waldo?" with the eye-tracking software.

EyeX’s concept video is a nice dose of futurism promoting possible scenarios if enough developers start creating software that supports the EyeX camera. Tobii’s strategy will be to get its sensor built into laptops because the company does not sell a separate consumer version.

From there, the company will need a gaggle of developers making enough software to make the hardware worth the extra expense. But if Tobii can do it, we all may be in for a more natural computing experience.

MSI Launches First Gaming Laptop with ’3K’ Screen Resolution

It might be a bit early to get a 4K TV, but gamers who want to immerse their eyes in pixels can dive in with what computer manufacturer MSI calls the first "3K" resolution gaming laptop, GT60 20D-261US, which went on this week, starting at $2,200.

The pixel behemoth features a 15.6-inch LCD display with a resolution of 2880 x 1620 pixels. (Following the logic that 4K or UHD TVs have a resolution of 3840 x 2160 almost 4,000 pixels across - MSI is claiming 3K, as its screen is almost 3,000 pixels across.)

If that isn’t enough, you can add three more monitors. This is the first laptop to support NVidia’s Surround technology, allowing the laptop to work with three external monitors, through the laptop’s single HDMI port and two mini-Display ports.

The GT60 sports other enhancements the company says are useful for a gaming machine. The keyboard has programmable keys and backlighting, as well as an adjusted layout that enlarges certain keys and moves others that might get in the way while gaming. It has three solid-state hard drives working as a Super Raid 2 array for quicker data reading and writing, MSI says. It also has MSI’s "Cooler Boost 2" technology, which the company states will provide 15 percent better cooling than the company’s previous gaming laptop, along with a 25 percent reduction in the laptop’s noise level.

Other notable features MSI extols include the "Killer DoubleShot" Ethernet and Wi-Fi adapters to reduce latency for online gaming (so you can keep up with other players in fast-paced games). There is also MSI’s NOS system, which will draw power from both the laptop’s battery and wall current at

once when plugged in, improving performance by 10 percent, according to MSI. It also features an i7-4700MQ Haswell processor from Intel and the NVidia GeForce GTX 780M graphics card with 4GB of RAM.

MSI calls the GTG0 the first "3K" gaming laptop. However, the MacBook Pro Retina 15 inch has an even higher resolution, at 2880 x 1800 (versus MSI's 2880 x 1620). Since Apple does not label the MBP as a "gaming laptop," MSI's claim is technically correct perhaps first PC 3K gaming laptop would be more accurate, though.

MSI also makes a mobile workstation with the 3K screen, the GT60 20KWS-278US, which sells for $2,800.

You can find details at MSI's website.

The Most Boring Game Ever? 3-D Line-Waiting Game Is Surprise Hit

A computer game so excruciatingly boring that most players are unable to play it for more than two or three minutes is emerging as a surprise hit.

In " Waitinginline3d," the goal is to stay awake while standing on a line of identical, highly-pixelated people for as long as possible. As time progresses, you begin to fall asleep, your awake meter heads toward zero, and the only way to wake yourself up is to punch yourself in the face (and punching, of course, adversely affects your health).

"Punch yourself in the face to stay awake, but don't punch yourself too much or you will die," the instructions for the game warned.

Since the game went live on Monday, it has been played nearly a hundred thousand times, according to interactive artist and director Rajeev Basu, who created the game.

"I wasn't sure how well it was going to do, but it's really picked up momentum and steam rapidly," Basu told ABC News. "It's been interesting seeing how long people have been lasting on twitter; most last between two and three minutes."

"It's about the balance between punching yourself to stay awake and making sure your health [meter] doesn't go all the way to zero," Basu said.

Basu says he's received a range of reactions to his game.

"Most boring game ever," and "worst game ever created," are two of the responses Basu says he's seen on Twitter.

"Best. Game. Ever.," was another response, said Basu, who added that several prominent gaming companies including Electronic Arts and Activision have expressed their enjoyment in playing his game.

Basu demurred when asked about the best strategy for his game, and warned that most players will be unable to score a single point before succumbing to inevitable boredom and despair.

"You have to stick it out for quite a while," Basu said. "Players will have to really keep with it to see how long."

Dad Tries to Buy Xbox One, Ends Up With $734 Photo of Xbox One

A dad attempting to buy an Xbox One "for his 4-year-old son" on eBay recently had his plans thwarted when he received a photo of the game console in the mail instead of the Xbox itself, the Nottingham Post reports.

The eBay listing did say "photo," the Post says, but the dad in question, Peter Clatworthy, looked it over and thought it seemed like a pretty solid deal before making the purchase. The sellers even had the gall to write "thank you for your purchase" on the back of the photo, he said.

A student, Mr. Clatworthy had been saving up to buy the limited edition Xbox as a surprise. He's contested the purchase with eBay, and the retail giant is investigating.

He paid £450 for the apparatus, which is $734 in American money, the Daily Dot says. If this isn't an argument in favor of buying your kid a stack of children's books for Christmas, we don't know what is.

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->A-ONE Gaming Online - Online Users Growl & Purr!
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Atari's Bankruptcy Escape Plan Is Court-approved

It's been less than a year since Atari filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy, and today the Wall Street Journal reports the company has secured approval from both its creditors and the court for a plan to pay back part of its debt and exit bankruptcy.

If successful, the U.S.-based Atari Inc. (formerly GT Interactive) appears poised to act on its previously-stated intent to separate from French parent company Atari S.A. - formerly known as Infogrames - and establish itself as a purveyor of fine digital-only games.

Atari's comeback plan, approved by Judge James Peck in the U.S. Bankruptcy Court of Manhattan, requires the company to pay back a $3.8 million bankruptcy loan from Alden Global Capital. Atari also promises to pay its unsecured creditors "up to $560,000" when it exits bankruptcy, plus a matching amount the year after and then an extra $630,000 the year after that, for a total of roughly $1.75 million. That doesn't sound like a bad deal, especially in light of the fact that Atari's unsecured creditors are reportedly owed $10.3 million.

Atari is expected to pay the debts from a $3.4 million cash reserve, along with an extra $1.75 million the company will receive when it formally exits bankruptcy. Atari successfully sold off a number of its properties at auction this summer - including Total Annihilation, Star Control and Master of Orion - so it seems likely that the company is relying on that

income to pay back its debts.

The loss of those much-loved franchises is likely to hamper Atari's efforts to become a major player in the digital games space, though it still has properties like Test Drive, RollerCoaster Tycoon and Fatty Bear's Birthday Surprise to fall back on.

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A-ONE's Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

Brazil Delays Vote on Anti-spying Internet Bill

A vote on a bill that would force Internet giants like Google and Facebook to keep Brazilians' information inside the country will be delayed until next year over disagreements about its content, a senior lawmaker told Reuters on Wednesday.

The bill would give President Dilma Rousseff powers to order Internet companies to store users' data in local servers, a move seen as response to allegations that the United States spied on her communications and that of thousands of regular Brazilians.

The delay is a temporary relief for Google and Facebook, which oppose a requirement they say would increase costs and erect unnecessary barriers in one of the world's largest Internet markets.

The postponement of the vote stems from disagreements among government allies in Congress over the requirement and a "neutrality" clause that bars telecom companies from charging different rates for Internet speed.

"There are disagreements in the allied base over the neutrality clause and data centers," said the Eduardo Cunha, head of the country's largest political party, the PMDB, in the lower chamber of Congress. "Discussions are stalled. The vote was delayed till next year."

Two other legislative and government sources also said the vote will be delayed until next year to hammer out a deal among the allied parties in Congress, which includes the PMDB.

Lawmakers, who go on holiday recess later this month, will likely resume the vote when they return to work the first week of February. The legislation has been on schedule to be voted on since November.

The controversy ignited by the bill is another example of the tense relations between Rousseff and the private sector, which accuses her government of intervening in sectors that range from oil to banking and electricity.

"The government still supports the idea of having local data centers, but has grown increasingly isolated," said Ronaldo Lemos, a professor at

Rio de Janeiro’s State University and one of the authors of the original draft.

"The other parties, including allies and the opposition, are widely inclined to not support the demand of having local data centers."

The government says the legislation will protect the privacy of Brazilians after documents leaked by former intelligence contractor Edward Snowden showed the U.S. National Security Agency spied on ordinary Brazilians, the country’s biggest company Petrobras and even Rousseff’s own communications.

Angered by the revelations, Rousseff canceled a state visit to Washington in October and denounced massive electronic surveillance of the Internet in a speech to the U.N. General Assembly. Other documents leaked by Snowden showed that the NSA also monitored the communications of other world leaders.

AT&T Says It Doesn’t Have To Disclose NSA Dealings

AT&T, under fire for ongoing revelations that it shares and sells customers’ communications records to the National Security Agency and other U.S. intelligence offices, says it isn’t required to disclose to shareholders what it does with customers’ data.

In a letter sent Thursday to the Securities and Exchange Commission, AT&T said it protects customer information and complies with government requests for records "only to the extent required by law."

The telecom giant’s letter was a response to a shareholder revolt sparked on Nov. 20 by the New York State Common Retirement Fund, the ACLU of Northern California and others. The groups are demanding that AT&T and Verizon be more transparent about their dealings with the NSA.

In the letter, obtained exclusively by The Associated Press before it was made public by the SEC, AT&T said information about assisting foreign intelligence surveillance activities is almost certainly classified. The company said it should not have to address the issue at its annual shareholders meeting this spring.

Nicole Ozer, technology and civil liberties policy director at the ACLU of Northern California said AT&T has overstepped its bounds.

"It’s outrageous that AT&T is trying to block the shareholder proposal," she said. "Customers have a right to know how often their private information is ending up in the government’s hands."

AT&T spokesman Mark Siegel said "the letter speaks for itself. We have no comment beyond it."

After the Sept. 11 terror attacks, U.S agencies established a warrantless program to monitor phone calls and e-mail between individuals in the United States and other countries who are suspected of having links to terrorism. But disclosures in recent weeks from former intelligence contractor Edward Snowden have exposed the breadth and depth of U.S. government surveillance programs on the Internet and over other telecommunications networks. The Washington Post reported this week that

the NSA tracks locations of nearly 5 billion cellphones every day overseas, including those of Americans.

Companies are responding to the revelations in a variety of ways. Tech firms including Yahoo and Google are pushing back, adding encryption, filing motions in the FISA court, and arguing that the NSA is overstepping its bounds.

But telecommunications firms appear to be cooperating fully.

"AT&T is trying to prevent the vital issue of customer privacy from coming before its shareholders. This issue is an important one for customers and shareholders alike and we feel strongly that it should be on AT&T's ballot this spring," said Eric Sumberg, spokesperson for New York State Comptroller Thomas P. DiNapoli.

DiNapoli co-signed the AT&T shareholder resolution on behalf of the New York State Common Retirement Fund, which holds assets totaling about $161 billion. The fund owns more than 15 million shares of AT&T valued at roughly $517 million.

"Customer trust is critical for any business, but nowhere is it more so than for those corporations that handle our personal data and communications," DiNapoli said.

AT&T shareholders Trillium Asset Management in Boston and Durham, N.C.-based Arjuna Capital/Baldwin Brothers were also part of the revolt, which demands that AT&T publish semi-annual transparency reports similar to those from Microsoft, Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook and Yahoo. The companies disclose the number of government requests for information and whether they comply.

But AT&T noted that those transparency reports don't disclose details about the requests or even separate out the number of National Security Letters companies receive. That information is withheld by the companies because they are barred by the federal government from revealing it, a prohibition many companies are fighting in court.

"In fact, all six Internet companies referenced in the (shareholder's) proposal state that they are not allowed to publicly disclose any such information in their Transparency or Law Enforcement Request Reports," said AT&T. "Therefore, because the proposal is over-broad, it is excludable..."

AT&T also argues that the issue of their disclosure practices with the NSA has not been a topic of "sustained debate over the last several years," a standard they say must be met to require public reporting.

Securities and Exchange Commission spokeswoman Christina D'Amico said the agency declined to comment.

U.S. Says Online Ads Should Be Clearly Marked, Undeceptive

The growing online usage of ads designed to blend in with the rest of a website's content, a practice known as "native advertising," may be illegal in some instances, the Federal Trade Commission warned on Wednesday.

The FTC said that a survey of online publishers found that 73 percent allowed native advertising, the digital descendent of the newspaper "advertorial" and television’s infomercials.

"Marketers have ... moved past the banner ad into advertising that is more seamlessly, and inconspicuously, integrated into digital content," FTC Chairwoman Edith Ramirez said in a speech that opened a conference on "Blurred Lines: Advertising or Content."

"While native advertising may certainly bring some benefits to consumers, it has to be done lawfully," she said. "By presenting ads that resemble editorial content, an advertiser risks implying, deceptively, that the information comes from a non-biased source."

The website Buzzfeed.com is often cited as an effective user of native advertising.

Among the content on the website recently was a list of "13 dogs who get an A for effort," sponsored by the pet food brand Purina Pro Plan, and a list of "15 Creative Snowmen That Will Blow Your Mind," sponsored by Columbia Sportswear.

Ramirez said the FTC was not contemplating specific regulations to deal with the issue in the online space.

The FTC has already pursued companies using existing authorities if it concluded that the line between unbiased editorial content and advertising had been crossed.

In June of this year, the commission sent letters to certain search engine companies, which it did not name, urging them to ensure that they carefully distinguish search results from paid advertisements.

The major search engines are Google, Microsoft’s Bing and Yahoo!.

The FTC also went after a company that used fake news sites to sell acai berry weight loss products, using logos like "One trick of a tiny belly" and similar come-ons.

The FTC caused a stir in 2009 when it issued guidelines requiring bloggers who endorse products to indicate if they have received any payment in cash or in products from the company involved.

Dan Jaffe, a top lobbyist at the Association of National Advertisers, said that nothing he heard from Ramirez on Wednesday indicated that the FTC planned to shift any strategies, but holding the workshop was a significant step.

Among the participants at the conference were publishing and ad industry representatives, consumer advocates, academics, and self-regulatory groups.

"This should be a signal to everyone that this is very high on their radar screen. ... The FTC is highly likely to step in forcefully in this area," Jaffe said.

Supreme Court To Decide on Patent Protections for Software

The Supreme Court agreed on Friday to rule on the divisive issue of what kinds of software are eligible for patent protection in a case being closely watched by the technology industry.

The court’s decision may prove key to deciding under what circumstances companies can be sued for using certain software in their products.

The court said in a one-line order that it would hear a case brought by Alice Corporation Pty Ltd, which holds a patent for a computer system that facilitates financial transactions. The patent is challenged by CLS Bank International.

The court took no action on another case raising the same issue involving a patent dispute between WildTangent Inc and Ultramercial Inc.

The deep interest that the software industry and patent experts have in what is a threshold issue in patent litigation was underscored by the number of companies and industry groups that asked the court to decide the issue.

Companies including Google Inc, Hewlett-Packard Co, Facebook Inc and Netflix Inc had already signaled their interest in the issue by asking the court to hear the WildTangent case. Many also filed briefs in lower courts.

With the rise of computer-based products in recent years, courts have struggled to apply patent law. Some legal experts, including the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a digital civil liberties group, say that courts are too keen to uphold patents on ideas that are too vague to deserve protection.

Such vague patents can be used against big tech companies, which say they are forced to spend money defending lawsuits instead of investing in research and development. Technology companies are particularly concerned about litigation brought by so-called "patent trolls," defined as companies that hold patents only for the purpose of suing other companies seeking to develop new products.

Companies differ over what type of patent protections software products should receive. While some, like Google, favor looser protections, others, like International Business Machines Corp would prefer that most software be patent eligible.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit, which has primary responsibility for interpreting patent law, has struggled to adopt a test that judges can use to review software patent claims, with various judges reaching different conclusions.

"Hopefully, the case will accomplish at the Supreme Court what it could not at the Federal Circuit: greater clarity in the law," said Alice’s attorney, Carter Phillips. CLS’s attorney, Mark Perry, declined to comment.

The legal question boils down to how innovative an invention should have to be to receive legal protection.

The law in question is the U.S. Patent Act, which states that anyone who "invents or discovers a new and useful process, machine, manufacture, or

composition of matter," or an improvement of an existing one, can get a patent.

An invention related to an abstract idea can be patented, but it must include a way of applying the idea.

Mark Lemley, a patent law expert at Stanford Law School, wrote in a brief filed on behalf of Facebook and others that the appeals court had left the law "hopelessly confused."

Lemley wrote in an email on Friday that he expects the high court to agree with the appeals court that the patents in question were not patent eligible.

"But the devil will be in the detail of the court’s opinion," he added.

Dennis Crouch, a professor at the University of Missouri School of Law who blogs about patent law, said he is amazed that courts have yet to determine once and for all that software can be patented.

The confusion has led patent lawyers to play down the software elements of inventions when applying for patents at the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, he added.

"My hope is that this case will be a vehicle for the Supreme Court to clarify the law so that we can get back to business rather than playing language games at the patent office," Crouch said.

The case is Alice Corporation v. CLS Bank, U.S. Supreme Court, No. 13-298.

Court Case Could Mean ’Death’ of Software Patents

The Supreme Court decided Friday to hear an appeal of a lower court decision that a federal judge called the "death" of software patents.

In a worst-case scenario for the high-tech industry, if the Supreme Court upholds the ruling it could invalidate many existing software patents or at least make them more difficult to defend in lawsuits.

Justices decided to hear an appeal from electronic marketplace Alice Corp., in its attempt to patent its computer-implemented escrow systems, software, and methods. It is being challenged by CLS Bank International.

The Supreme Court has already ruled that abstract ideas, natural phenomena and laws of nature cannot be patented but has refused so far to decide whether software, online-shopping techniques and medical diagnostic tests fit into that realm.

The U.S. Court of Appeals for the Federal Circuit determined that Alice Corp.’s patents couldn’t be granted. Five of the 10-member panel agreed that Alice’s attempt to patent its way of using third-party escrow accounts to overcome the risks of fraud and non-payment were not eligible to be patented. The other judges concurred in part and dissented in part.

Dissenting judges called the decision potentially disruptive to the patent system.

"Let’s be clear: if all of these claims, including the system claims, are not patent-eligible, this case is the death of hundreds of thousands of patents, including all business method, financial system, and software patents as well as many computer implemented and telecommunications patents," said Judge Kimberly Moore.

"There has never been a case which could do more damage to the patent system than this one," said Judge Pauline Newman.

Tech companies say software patents have played a critical role in keeping the U.S. at the cutting edge by giving people control over their inventions for nearly 20 years.

Justices will hear the case next year.

The case is 13-298, Alice Corp., v. CLS Bank International.

Microsoft Leads Disruption of Largest Infected Global PC Network

Microsoft Corp said on Thursday it had disrupted the largest network of compromised personal computers, involving some 2 million machines around the world, since it stepped up its battle against organized online criminals three years ago.

The Redmond, Wash.-based software giant filed a lawsuit in Texas and won a judge’s order directing Internet service providers to block all traffic to 18 Internet addresses that were used to direct fraudulent activity to the infected machines.

Law enforcement in many European countries served warrants at the same time, seizing servers expected to contain more evidence about the leaders of the ZeroAccess crime ring, which was devoted to "click fraud."

Such rings use networks of captive machines, known as botnets, in complicated schemes that force them to click on ads without the computer owners’ knowledge. The schemes cheat advertisers on search engines including Microsoft’s Bing by making them pay for interactions that have no chance of leading to a sale. Microsoft said the botnet had been costing advertisers on Bing, Google Inc and Yahoo Inc an estimated $2.7 million monthly.

The coordinated effort marks the eighth time Microsoft has moved against a botnet and a rare instance of it doing serious damage to one that is controlled with a peer-to-peer mechanism, where infected machines give each other instructions instead of relying on a central server that defenders can hunt down and disable.

But the ZeroAccess botnet still had a weakness: The code in the infected machines told them to reach out to one of the 18 numeric Internet addresses for details on which ads to click.

Microsoft recently opened a new Cybercrime Center in Redmond and is using new tools in its efforts. They are helped by a provision in trademark that allows pretrial seizure of suspected counterfeit goods, including websites that, as in the present case, are spreading tainted versions of the Internet Explorer browser.

The company is working with national computer security authorities in various countries and with Internet service providers to notify individual computer owners with infected machines, hoping to reach most of them before the fraudsters can spread new instructions.

Microsoft has been sharing evidence with the FBI and Europol, the continent’s law enforcement coordinating service. National agencies took part in seizure actions in Germany, Switzerland, Latvia, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands.

For now, at least, the fraud by this network has stopped, said Microsoft Assistant General Counsel Richard Boscovich.

The operators of the botnet are believed to be in Russia, while the author of the malicious software distributed on it could be based elsewhere, Boscovich said.

Deutsche Bank Bans Online Chats for FX and Fixed Income Staff

Deutsche Bank has prohibited its foreign exchange and fixed income staff from using online chatrooms, joining a growing band of lenders who have halted the use of such forums over concerns of mounting scrutiny from regulators.

Chat rooms have been a focus for regulators investigating manipulation of benchmark interest rates and possible rigging in the $5.3 trillion-a-day foreign exchange market.

"We have banned the use of multi-party chatrooms in FX (foreign exchange) trading already in the first quarter, and we have extended this ban to other parts of our fixed income business", a Deutsche Bank spokesman said on Wednesday.

Last week, UBS issued a memo to staff banning the use of multibank and social chat rooms at its investment banking division.

Citigroup and Barclays have also clamped down on chatroom use, according to people familiar with the matter.

Citigroup and Barclays declined to comment.

Chat communications featured prominently in a five-year probe into manipulation of a key interest rate known as the London interbank offered rate, or Libor, which has so far seen five financial firms pay more than $3.5 billion in penalties.

In a global probe into possible currency manipulation, regulators are scrutinizing messages between traders for alleged evidence that they worked together improperly to influence currency "fixes" - the daily snapshots of trading used by companies and portfolio managers for valuing their assets.

Britain’s Taxman Catches Up With Online Bookmakers

Bookmakers are preparing for a tax avoidance crackdown on online gambling in Britain that will cost the industry 300 million pounds ($490 million) a year, putting a brake on the fastest growing part of their businesses.

Many bookmakers have set up internet operations in territories such as Gibraltar, allowing them to sign up British gamblers while benefiting from benign local tax regimes.

Britain’s government, however, is taking a tough line on tax avoidance as it seeks to swell the Treasury’s coffers, planning a 15 percent duty on bookmakers’ online winnings from British-based customers from next December.

That would bring the tax regime into line with the duties bookmakers pay on takings in betting shops and provide a rare example of taxation policy catching up with the internet age.

With Britain’s online market estimated at more than 2 billion pounds ($3.2 billion) a year, companies such as William Hill, Ladbrokes and Ireland’s Paddy Power will pay an extra 300 million pounds to the taxman.

In preparation, they are stepping up already aggressive advertising campaigns to chase market share while also looking to cut costs and expand in other countries.

Some analysts have argued for a lower tax rate to avoid boosting the black market. They say that firms beyond the reach of the authorities could offer better odds, tempting gamblers to hand over credit card details to unlicensed operators.

Regulated companies, meanwhile, could ultimately be forced to cut back on some of the free bets and other expensive promotional ploys they use to attract new customers.

Fans watching soccer and other sports on British television currently face a blizzard of advertising, urging them to go online to bet on the next twist in the live action.

Gambling accounted for 4 percent of advertising spots on commercial TV in 2012, up from less than 1 percent in 2006.

A small difference in the tax could have a "significant effect on the amount of online betting that switches from UK-regulated and taxed providers to untaxed offshore providers which might not be appropriately regulated", said Simon Trussler of consultancy KPMG, which recently wrote a study for the Remote Gambling Association on the impact of the tax.

Industry insiders acknowledge that lawmakers are unlikely to show them any sympathy and some politicians have pointed to family owned Bet365 as an example of what can be achieved.

The British-based business has paid its fair share in gambling duty yet has still managed to build a market-leading position in online sports betting over the past decade.

Bet365 declined to comment for this article but said in its most recent accounts that it welcomes the new tax, adding that it will allow the company to stay in Britain.

Its rivals, meanwhile, face the challenge of an additional tax bill running into tens of millions of pounds.

William Hill, Britain’s largest bookmaker, is committed to investing in marketing and innovation to stay competitive, its director of investor relations, Lyndsay Wright, said. "But as analyst forecasts show, it will be impossible to mitigate much of the hit to profits in 2015," she added.

Online betting exchange Betfair said this week that the tax would have cost it 17 million pounds had it been in force in the six months to October 31.

Under the new system bookmakers will pay according to where their customers live, while a new licensing regime is intended to help gamblers to identify reputable operators.

Betfair CEO Breon Corcoran welcomed the regulation but said it must be enforced properly to lock out unlicensed firms and ensure that none can circumvent advertising bans by using online ads or sports sponsorship.

"If the government puts pressure on marketing partners to control that and indeed puts pressure on the banks to ensure that payments aren’t facilitated to unlicensed operators, we’ll get to a level playing field," he told reporters.

"Then the good operators licensed in this market can continue to grow, serve the customer and pay taxes."

In the short term, the largest players are battling it out to secure a bigger slice of a highly fragmented sector in which more than 20 companies compete.

William Hill CEO Ralph Topping told analysts in October that the new tax could have a "silver lining" for his company as some rivals struggle to survive under the new regime.

In the longer term, the big guns aim to expand in other regulated markets, such as Spain and Australia, while keeping an eye on the big prize of the United States as a growing number of individual states relax bans on internet gambling. ($1 = 0.6127 British pounds)

Tech Gurus Help Boost Speedy Internet in Schools

Needed to keep a school building running these days: Water, electricity and broadband.

Interactive digital learning on laptops and tablets is replacing traditional textbooks in many cases. Students are taking computer-based tests instead of fill-in-the bubble exams. Teachers are accessing far-off resources for lessons.

Technology is changing the way students are taught and tested. But there’s a catch most of it is occurring in schools that have rich connectivity to the Internet.

Although nearly every school has Internet access, classrooms frequently are not connected or the connections are super slow.

The hurdle is limited capacity inside schools to transmit data, or bandwidth.

"It’s the backbone. We have to actually think not just about the sustainability of the current traffic, we’re talking about exploding traffic," said Raj Adusumilli, assistant superintendent for information services in the Arlington Public Schools in northern Virginia.

The effort to get high-speed Internet access in every school got a boost Wednesday from the philanthropy of two technology gurus Facebook creator Mark Zuckerberg and Microsoft Corp. co-founder Bill Gates. Zuckerberg’s Startup: Education and Gates’ foundation have contributed a combined $9 million to the nonprofit EducationSuperHighway, a San Francisco-based nonprofit working to improve connectivity in schools.

"When schools and teachers have access to reliable Internet connections, students can discover new skills and ideas beyond the classroom," Zuckerberg said in a statement.

The funds are expected to be used to provide technical expertise to schools and use competition to help drive costs down.

It likely would cost billions to get high-speed Internet access to every school in America.

President Barack Obama this past summer set a goal of having 99 percent of students connected to high-speed Internet connections within five years. Also, the Federal Communications Commission is weighing changes to a program to increase connectivity in schools.

Today, about 80 percent of schools have Internet capabilities that are too slow or isolated to places like front offices and computer labs, said Richard Culatta, director of education technology at the Education Department. Many schools have the same amount of connectivity as an average home. That means several hundred kids or more operate on an Internet connection similar to that used in a house by four family members. That leads to networks that are slow and prone to crashing.

"There are many examples of fantastic things happening across the country, but they are happening in places where infrastructure is in place that supports these types of innovations," Culatta said.

At Jamestown Elementary School in Arlington, Va., first and second graders use iPads to document the growth of caterpillars for a science project or record themselves reading out loud as they make electronic books.

"It’s fun. You can draw and make books and movies," said 7-year-old Braeden Meeker. "We learn writing and math. We learn a lot of things."

But one day in class, the system crashed when students tried to look up their house on a Google map.

The district has upgraded to high-speed broadband, or Internet access that is always available and faster than dialup, in middle and high schools and is in the process of doing the same in elementary schools. The district’s goal is to assign a device to each student by 2017.

In some districts, particularly rural ones, cost is a huge factor in getting access to lines that would bring broadband into schools. To buy

the equipment and install Wi-Fi costs an estimated $30,000 to $50,000 per school and to run fiberoptics into the school can cost tens of thousands more per mile, said Evan Marwell, CEO of EducationSuperHighway.

A lack of competition for broadband access helps drive up costs at Chautauqua County Unified Schools, a district with about 360 students in an agriculture and oil community in rural Kansas. About three-quarters of students in the district qualify for free or reduced lunches.

The district relies on distance learning to teach Spanish, physics and calculus and has issued an iPad to all students in upper grades, said Nancy Pinard, the district's technology director. Its broadband bill would be about $9,000 a month without a special Federal Communications Commission program that reduces it to $2,000 to $3,000 a month.

"My big thing is the cost of it," Pinard said. "How long will be able to maintain where we are at just because of the cost."

The drive for increased broadband capabilities has been fueled in part by a drop in the price of tablets and their rising popularity, said Doug Levin, executive director of the State Educational Technology Directors Association. More apps and other educational software are available and states and districts have loosened rules to allow textbook dollars to be spent on digital learning, he said.

"It used to be OK that some students could access these opportunities and others couldn't, and the big shift is now there really is an expectation that all kids need to access" these opportunities, Levin said.

Another factor is preparation for tests connected to Common Core academic standards rolling out in most of the country. The shift to computer-based tests requires more bandwidth than many districts have.

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, said the issue goes beyond technology in schools. About half of American children live in poverty and many of them don't have technology at home, she said.

At the same time, she questioned Zuckerberg's and Gates' motives. "So the question I have is, why are these foundations doing this now? Are they doing it because of the Common Core testing? Or, are they doing it because we want to actually help kids succeed," Weingarten said in an interview.

A few minutes later, she amended her response. "Let me just say on the record, it's great that they want to help deal with the digital divide. I'd like for them to help with other things as well but it's great that they want to help with the divide."

New USB Connector Plugs in Upside Down or Rightside Up

Anyone who's hooked up a USB device to their computer knows it's a slightly irritating process. You switch between sticking it in upside down and rightside up, jiggling it around until it finally goes into its slot. But that concern could become a ghost of technology past.

The USB 3.0 Promoter Group announced that a new connector, USB Type-C, is

being developed.

"We recognize the need to develop a new connector to meet evolving design trends in terms of size and usability," Brad Saunders, chairman of the industry standards group, said in a statement. "The new Type-C connector will fit well with the market's direction and affords an opportunity to lay a foundation for future versions of USB."

Unlike the Type-A USB connector, the type most often seen plugged into your computer, the Type-C will work either up or down. "Users will no longer need to be concerned with plug orientation/cable direction," the USB 3.0 Promoter Group said in its statement.

However, there is a catch. The new USB connector is smaller than the traditional Type-A cable, so it will not directly connect to the standard ports. "The Type-C specification will define passive new-to-existing cables and adapters to allow users to use their existing products," the group said.

But the cable's smaller size and shape may not be made with a computer's USB ports in mind. Alex Peleg, VP of Intel's Platform Engineering Group, said that the new connector will usher in a new class of even thinner electronic devices.

"This new industry standards-based thin connector delivering data, power, and video is the only connector one will need across all devices," he said in a statement.

The Type-C connector will be available in the mid-2014, officials said.

Facebook Phases In 'Unfollow' Button

Facebook Inc has replaced its "Hide All" button with the more succinct "Unfollow," letting users block all messages and posts from selected friends.

As with the previous button, it gives users the option of blocking content from certain people without offending them, say through de-friending. The latter alternative severs ties with that person on the social network, without notifying them.

"This means you are still friends, but updates from that person won't appear in your News Feed. The goal of this change is to help people curate their newsfeed and see more of the content that they care about," Facebook said in an email.

The world's largest social network is constantly tweaking its newsfeed - the main page users look at on the network - often by reducing clutter, especially from advertising, and bringing to the surface or revealing the posts deemed most relevant to any particular user.

Facebook began rolling out the "Unfollow" button and a related change to its users on Monday. It added a "Following" button next to the usual "Like" button on a page or next to the "Friends" button on a personal timeline, which will also enable users to block posts.

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